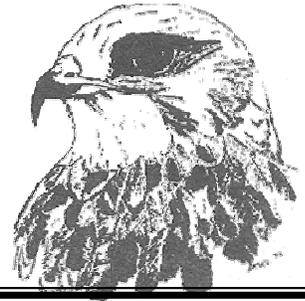


February 2011

Birding Observer



Five Valleys Audubon Society, a Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Calendar

- * **Monday, February 7th, 7pm:** Alex Taft will host the board meeting.
- * **Monday, February 14th, 7:30pm:** Rob Domenech of the Raptor View Research Institute will discuss Golden Eagle migration ecology at the February program meeting. This is also the Chapter's Annual Meeting.
- * **Friday, February 11th:** Submission deadline for the March edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- * **Saturday, February 19th:** Monthly beginning bird walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet at the Visitor's Center. Learn basic skills for bird identification, including use of binoculars and field guides, key field marks, and much more. Binoculars provided if needed. Families with children and birders of any level are welcome! Co-sponsored by Five Valleys Audubon Society, Bitterroot Audubon Society and Lee Metcalf NWR.
- * **Saturday, February 26th:** Full-day field trip to the Mission Valley. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8:00 AM or at the Cenex Gas Station in Ronan at 9:00 AM.

Tracking the health and migration of Golden Eagles

Rob Domenech of the Raptor View Research Institute will present the next program on **Monday, February 14 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14 (lower level)** on the University of Montana campus. His talk will be on Golden Eagle migration ecology, with an emphasis on the Institute's studies of adult Golden Eagle satellite tracking and blood-lead levels of fall migrating Golden Eagles.



Raptor View Research Institute (RVRI) was incorporated in 2004 as a nonprofit research and educational organization by Robert Domenech, Executive Director. Raptor View Research Institute's primary mission is to understand and preserve raptor populations in western North America and educate youth about ecological processes and field studies. Rob has been studying migratory patterns and ecology of raptors since 1998 and has since become one of the leading authorities on Golden Eagle migration along the Rocky Mountain Front. Recently, RVRI has teamed up with long-time raptor migration experts Fred Tilly (Western Flyway Coordinator of Hawk Migration Association of North America) and Steve Hoffman (E.D. Montana Audubon) to create one of the best migration think-tanks available. As a team, they have surveyed dozens of ridges for migration flights and identified several of the best migration observation sites in Montana. Domenech has begun one of the most in-depth studies on adult Golden Eagle migratory ecology in the West, including point count monitoring, satellite tracking, feather isotope analysis, wing-tagging, morphometric analysis, and blood contaminant levels. Other RVRI projects include nesting ecology of Swainson's Hawks and contaminant loads and productivity rates in Osprey.

In addition, Edith Dooley, a recipient of a 2010 Phillip L. Wright memorial research award, will tell us what she learned on her study titled "The effects of tree host species and fungal symbionts on mountain pine beetle productivity in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem." She is a graduate student at UM studying natural resource conservation.

The shelves of bookstores nowadays hold about as many field guides and other books about trees as those devoted to birds. Even David Allen Sibley has written and illustrated one, *The Sibley Guide to Trees* that "covers the identification of 668 native and commonly cultivated trees found in the temperate areas of North America." His *Sibley Guide to Birds* covers 810 species, but in a much larger area of "all adjacent islands" and "offshore waters to a distance of 200 miles." If we stick to dry land, there are about as many species of trees as birds to be seen. In fact the oldest conservation organization in North America, founded in 1875 as the American Forestry Association but now called American Forests, publishes a National Register of Big Trees with the names of over 800 trees species occurring in North America.

Tree watching is almost as interesting as bird watching and it is an easier pursuit because the subjects remain in one place and do not flit about, and binoculars are not required. If a second look is necessary, a tree can be revisited. It can be touched, its parts collected and carried away for comparison and identification. You can make a scrapbook of tree leaves, or a holiday wreath, or other decorative items, without a federal permit as required for possession of bits of birds. And trees do not migrate, so if you wish to find a rare species, it will be in the same location at any season of the year. Someone setting out to see all the tree species in North America in one year will not have to dash about so frantically as do birders in pursuit of rare migrants. So, slow down, take it easy, and get to know your trees.

Deciduous broadleaf trees that, like many bird species, change the color of their plumage with the seasons, have been the favorite subjects of casual tree watchers and "leaf peeping" is a favorite autumn weekend activity where a great variety of

such trees occur east of the Great Plains. On the other hand, most forests here are composed of evergreen needleleaf trees, and we do not get to see such an array of colorful leaves. In the West the quaking aspen shoulders the responsibility for adding color to our forests but its pallet is limited to various shades of yellow, gold, and orange.

To the casual observer, aspens appear to be rather small, and boring, broadleaf trees. They are rarely more than two feet in diameter, and only 25 to 80 feet tall. But try to dig up an aspen "tree" and you find that it has large roots connecting it to other aspen, which are connected to yet more aspen. What appear to be individual trees are the aboveground stems of a clone in which each "tree" originates as a sprout (or ramet) from that extensive hidden root system. Aspen stems within a clone are genetically identical individuals produced without benefit of sexual reproduction. The clones vary in size, so that what we perceive as a grove of individual aspen stems may be just one clone, or it may be two clones growing intermingled, or several clones next to each other.

The alert tree watcher can sort out the puzzling mosaic of aspen clones in a forested landscape by observing the genetically determined traits that distinguish one clone from another, particularly in autumn when the differences become more obvious as the leaves of each clone turn different colors before falling off at different times. The largest known aspen clone, discovered in Utah in the 1970s, occupies more than 100 acres and is composed of over 47,000 stems. The mass of that one aspen clone, with all those roots and stems and leaves, was estimated to be over 14 million pounds, making it the largest and heaviest known organism on earth – three times heavier than "General Sherman," the largest giant sequoia, and forty times the weight of a blue whale.



Among birds and mammals, different species grow, and live, at different rates so that milestones of their lifespans—birth, reproduction, senescence, and death—are relative. A shrew burns its candle of life within the gestation period of an elephant. A humming bird lives faster than a condor. And so it is with plants. Yet some tree species challenge our ideas of what it is to be a tree, and how to measure the span of a life. Among them is the humble quaking aspen.

How old an aspen clone might be is still open to question. Any one individual aspen stem has a lifespan of 100 to 200 years, but the clone goes on and on with new sprouts replacing dead stems. Therefore, there is no continuous accumulation of growth rings, clone age must be estimated by indirect means, and the estimates vary widely. Because there was little evidence of sexual reproduction by aspen in the Great Basin, there was a consensus among botanists that clones in the arid west may be as much as 5,000 to 10,000 years old, getting started in a more amenable climate sometime after the glaciers retreated from those mountains. A few botanists believed some clones, in locations where glaciers did not reach, were even older. Then the Yellowstone National Park fires in 1988 and the Bitterroot National Forest fires in 2000 demonstrated aspen's ability to establish new stands from seeds blowing into the burned areas. The ideas of clone age had to be revised.

And some other trees seem to be getting younger. For instance, "General Sherman," the largest giant

sequoia, is 275 feet tall and 30 feet in diameter. Growth ring counts on stumps of much smaller *Sequoiadendron giganteum* revealed ages of up to 3,200 years so, in the belief that larger meant older, General Sherman was once estimated to be more than 5,000 years old. As techniques for estimating age became more accurate, that was revised downward to between 2,500 and 3,500 years. In 2009 ecologists with the U. S. Geological Survey decided that a more precise age for General Sherman was between 2,100 and 2,200 years. In other words, the tree is large because it is growing very fast, not because it is very old.

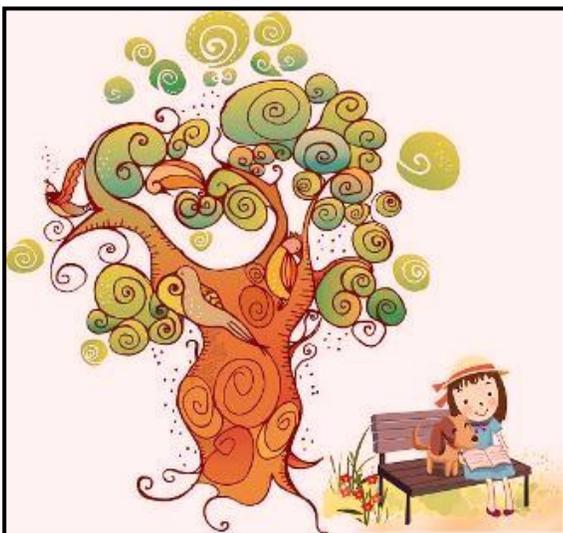
But, if even a few clones of quaking aspen are many thousands of years old, where does that leave the ancient bristlecone pines on the longevity scale? They have something like an asterisk in the record books, and qualifying adjectives next to their name. The Great Basin bristlecone pine (*Pinus longaeva*), with ring counts over 4,900 years, is considered the longest-lived of all sexually-reproducing, non-clonal tree species. And without the help of drugs.

Advanced Birding Workshop by Larry Weeks

An advanced birding workshop has been scheduled for February and March 2011 that will include seven sessions on Thursday nights from 7pm-9:30pm at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regional Office on Spurgin Road. Each session will be devoted to one bird group. The date, subject and presenter of each session are as follows:

Date	Bird Group	Presenter
Feb 17	Owls	Denver Holt
Feb 24	Shorebirds	Jim Brown
Mar 3	Flycatchers	Kristina Smucker
Mar 10	Forest birds	Jim Sparks
Mar 17	Raptors	Steve Hoffman
Mar 24	Sparrows	Terry McEneaney
Mar 31	Gulls	Terry McEneaney

A person may decide to attend a single session, any combination of sessions or all 7 sessions. The cost will be \$15 per session or \$70 for all 7 sessions. To sign up, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or bwsgenea@onlinemt.com.



2010 Missoula Christmas Bird Count by Larry Weeks, compiler



The Missoula Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 18th. The weather was tough on some of the field participants with temperatures in the range of 0 – 20 degrees F and winds up to 26 mph and gusts up to 36 mph. In spite of the weather, the Count tallied 72 species which is at our average. 52 people participated in the field count and there were 27 feeder watchers. Six trumpeter swans (Jim Brown) were a first for the Missoula Count. Other good birds included 6 tundra swans (Dick Hutto & Sue Reel), golden eagle (Brian Williams), Cooper's hawk (Paul Loehnen), prairie falcon (Terry Toppins), northern saw-whet owl (Joe Regan), winter wren (Norm & Cathy Smyers), yellow-rumped warbler (Robin Anderson), and Harris' sparrow (Jim Brown). Jim Brown's group birded Mastel and Jim Edwards' properties and had the only northern pintail and American wigeon. Rose Leach's group birded Mullan Rd. and

had the only gadwall and gray partridge. Joe Elliott's group birded LaValle and Butler Creeks and had the only ruffed grouse. Brian Williams birded the Stewart Peak trail and had the only golden-crowned kinglets. Other group leaders included Poody McLaughlin and Joe Regan who birded Kelly Island, Virginia Vincent who birded Target Range and Orchard Homes, Steve Schlang who birded Woods Gulch, Norm & Cathy Smyers who birded Tower St. Open Space and State Nursery, Paul Loehnen who birded Council Grove and Kona Ranch, Terry Toppins who birded Maclay and Big Flats, Jim Sparks who birded the upper Clark Fork and Kim Williams trail, Megan Fylling who birded West of the airport, Robin Anderson who birded the University and Greenough Park, Will McDowell who birded Crazy Canyon, Dick Hutto & Sue Reel who birded Stevens Island and Rattlesnake Greenway, and the author birded Grant Creek. The day ended with another fabulous potluck dinner at the home of Ruth & Russ Royter. 32 people attended the potluck and the bird tabulation. A big thank you to Ruth & Russ for hosting again and to everyone who participated in the Count.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2010

great blue heron (15)	ruffed grouse (2)	Red-breasted nuthatch (274)
tundra swan (6)	wild turkey (126)	White-breasted nuthatch (16)
trumpeter swan (6)	Killdeer (10)	pygmy nuthatch (62)
Canada goose (565)	Wilson's snipe (10)	brown creeper (8)
Green-winged teal (17)	rock pigeon (150)	Pacific wren (1)
Mallard (566)	mourning dove (41)	American dipper (8)
northern pintail (8)	Eurasian-collared dove (70)	Golden-crowned kinglet (2)
Gadwall (2)	great horned owl (13)	Townsend's solitaire (15)
American wigeon (1)	northern pygmy owl (5)	American robin (43)
common goldeneye (71)	Long-eared owl (21)	Bohemian waxwing (413)
Barrow's goldeneye (cw)	northern saw-whet owl (1)	cedar waxwing (192)
hooded merganser (cw)	belted kingfisher (7)	northern shrike (2)
common merganser (20)	downy woodpecker (65)	European starling (5)
bald eagle (46)	hairy woodpecker (26)	Yellow-rumped warbler (1)
golden eagle (1)	northern flicker (166)	American tree sparrow (4)
Sharp-shinned hawk (10)	pileated woodpecker (9)	song sparrow (47)
Cooper's hawk (1)	Steller's jay (14)	Harris' sparrow (1)
Red-tailed hawk (23)	blue jay (cw)	Dark-eyed junco (297)
Rough-legged hawk (29)	Clark's nutcracker (31)	Red-winged blackbird (78)
American kestrel (2)	Black-billed magpie (324)	house finch (297)
Merlin (2)	American crow (178)	red crossbill (170)
prairie falcon (1)	common raven (192)	pine siskin (123)
gray partridge (20)	Black-capped chickadee (322)	American goldfinch (76)
Ring-necked pheasant (23)	mountain chickadee (17)	evening grosbeak (48)
dusky grouse (3)	Chestnut-backed chickadee (2)	house sparrow (446)
72 species, 3 count week birds, 5968 total birds		

Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards

In 1987 Five Valleys Audubon Society began a program of awarding small amounts of money to help students fund small research projects. Originally called the Field Biology Research Awards, in 1992 the name of the program was changed to the Philip L. Wright Research Awards in recognition of Dr. Wright's contributions to science, Montana, and Missoula. In those 24 years, 52 university and high school students have received a total of \$21,586 from the program. The amount per award has ranged from \$100 to \$1,010, and the average is \$400. Subjects of the research have been distributed as follows: birds 20, plants and habitats 11, mammals 9, amphibians 7, insects 4, fish 2. And, while most of these small studies have been carried out within Montana, some have been in Arizona, California, Hawaii, Central America, and Southeast Asia. Requests for proposals for research to be funded this year have been distributed to schools. Proposals for the 2011 awards will be due on April 1, 2011.

February Brings Spring Inklings by Poody McLaughlin

Byron Weber, from his published natural history calendars, provides a posthumous look at what harbingers of spring we can discover during this winter month. "This is a good time to dust off the field guides and spend an evening or two identifying plants and birds as spring migration begins to gather momentum. A month from now, the outdoors will be swarming with new arrivals. The time spent now in preparation will be appreciated." Below is an abbreviated chronology of February's commotion that Byron discovered, and you can too.

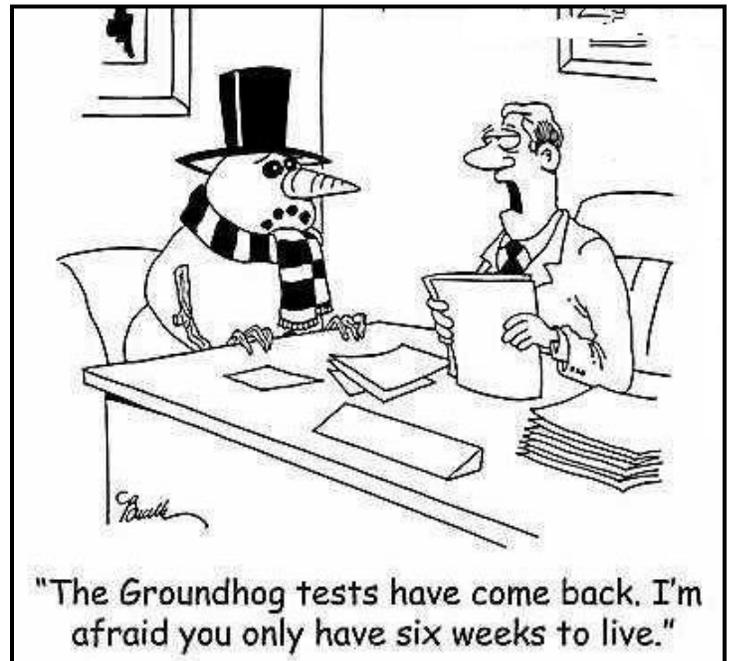
Week 1: On the 2nd, Groundhog Day is a cross-quarter day, which falls approximately halfway between the winter solstice and the vernal equinox. Daylight is increasing. •Olive Midge hatch, Rattlesnake Creek. •The male Townsend's Solitaire sings in winter. Find some juniper and hear his song. •Honeybees are out on the first warm day. •American Dippers are warbling along the Bitterroot River. •Start sniffing for a skunk.

Week 2: Black-capped Chickadees practice their two-note spring song. •Dark Brown Stonefly hatch. •Red-winged Blackbirds "sing" from cattails. •Pocket gopher mounds found under the melted snow. •First robin, 1986. •Great Horned Owl lays her first egg.

Week 3: Look for Snow Geese. •More robins. •Plan to prune those fruit trees. •Starlings arrive in nesting areas. •Mound-building ants are active on sunny days. •Adult beaver at 3rd St. and Orange, 1984. •Build some bird houses this weekend. Be ready this year.

Week 4: Pine siskins to House Finches: 13-1. •Waterfowl begins to arrive, Metcalf Natl. Wildlife Refuge. •Milbert's Tortoiseshell Butterfly, Florence and Stevensville. •Bitterroot River normally rises now. •First bloom of the buttercup. •Rough-legged Hawk flies north. •Large flocks of Robins. •Meadowlark singing. •Succulent leaves of the Bitterroot flower appear. •Song Sparrow leaves February singing.

Compiled from Natural History Calendars: 1985 The Field Trip, U of M, 1900; 1986 A Description of the Bitter Root and Missoula Valleys; 1987, The Legacy of K.D. Swan, Photographer, US Forest Service.



Glasgow and Your Lodging Options

Montana Audubon's Annual *Wings Across the Big Sky* Bird Festival

A small town like Glasgow, Montana*, might not have a plethora of lodging choices, but we have come up with several ideas for our annual bird festival—thanks to the local Bird Festival Committee and Chamber of Commerce. The Cottonwood Inn (www.cottonwoodinn.net) will likely be first choice for many attendees: It will be the stage for festival activities: registration, lectures, meals, banquet, etc. Currently we have 85 rooms blocked out for festival-goers on Friday and Saturday nights. (One Queen/King bed at \$70 per night or two King/Queen beds at \$75 per night) We suggest you make your reservations soon!

- Campbell Lodge, 534 3rd Ave S, Glasgow – 406-228-9328
- La Casa Motel, 238 First Ave N-Hwy 2, Glasgow – 877-228-9311 / 406-228-9311
- Fort Peck Hotel, 175 South Missouri Street, Fort Peck – 800-560-4931 / 406-526-3266
- Lakeridge Motel & Tackle, 6004 MT Hwy 24 S, Fort Peck – 888-554-8125 / 406-526-3597

Carbon Neutral & Transportation

Once again, *Wings Across the Big Sky* will strive to be a carbon neutral event. We will track our festival emissions, look for ways to reduce them, and offset what we cannot avoid (more information will be on our website soon). Please consider carpooling options! We also plan for vans to depart from major cities to Glasgow based on demand. If you are interested in this travel option, please notify Larissa Berry at lberry@mtaudubon.org.

*Refer to last month's newsletter for "save-the-date" (June 3–5), brief description of the 3-day festival, which includes a Friday "pre-festival" day of workshops, and our **campground/RV recommendations**. All of the above information is also included on our website complete with links to hotel websites: www.mtaudubon.org (click on our Bird Festival link on home page). Moreover, look for your festival registration brochure to arrive in early March. As always, happy birding!

If you have questions, please contact Larissa Berry at lberry@mtaudubon.org or 406-443-3949.

Annual Membership Meeting

Five Valleys Audubon Society will hold its Annual Membership Meeting on Monday February 14th during our usual monthly meeting. We will elect a number of Officers and Directors as follows:

- President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer: the incumbents (Paul Loehnen, Pat Little, Char Murray, and Alex Taft) are standing for re-election
- Three of the six Director positions: the incumbents (Carolyn Goren, Bill DeCou, and Gerhard Knudsen) are standing for re-election
- One vacant Director position

The Board's Nominating Committee will be bringing a candidate forward for the vacant Director position - if you have any suggestions please forward them to Pat, Alex, or Carolyn. Other nominations for any position are welcomed from the floor at the Annual Meeting.



Welcome New Members:

Carol Addis
Melodee Bureson
Coreen Faulkner
Sonya Germann
Barbara Huff
Robert McKelvey
John Stevens

Anita Aronofsky
Jann Clouse
Linda Firebaugh
Weber Greiser
Helena S. Koelle
Jane S. Ragsdale
Owen Thilly

Marilyn Baide
Clancy Cone
Maureen Frolich
Debra Howell
Mary Langenderfer
Heather Schneider
Melissa Tuckerman

Rae Brown
Carolyn D. Duke
Marlene Geil
Fran Huberty
Karen Lessnau
Ellie Sigrist

Thanks to our Returning Members:

Robert A. Anderson
Roxy Boettcher
Mrs. Donovan
Pamela Frasier-Adler
Mrs. Henderson
Gerhard & Gayle A. Knudsen
Barbara Lee
Poody McLaughlin
Donald & Charla Murray
Howard Reinhardt
Kathleen Spritzer
Virginia Vincent

Anne T. Arrington
Liz Bradley
Susan M. Falsey
Erin Gilder
Ronda Howlett
Mrs. Kraut
Mary Lyndes
Glen Moffatt
Darlene Normand
Michele Riordan
Jeff Stickney
Patty Walker

Melody Asher
Linda Briggeman
Mark Feasel
Kate Goodwin
Holly Jaspersen
Jackson Kress
Michael Mcbride
Miriam Morgan
Sherene Petersen
Sarah Schmill
Fred & Cathy Tilly
Richard & Carol Walker

Nanette Ault DDS
Peter Bring
N. Forcier
Barbara D. Harris
Naomi Kimbell
Evy O. Leary
Amanda McGill
Scott Morgan
Margaret Petty
Jane Selvig
Terry Toppins

Join National Audubon Society and Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and my local Chapter. I will receive the *Audubon* magazine and the *Birding Observer*, as well as participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

\$20 for a one-year membership
for an individual or family

Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to: National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. **C1Z N53 0Z**

Join Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a Chapter member of the Five Valleys Audubon Society. I will receive the *Birding Observer* and may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues remain entirely with the Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email (optional): _____

\$15 is enclosed for Chapter-only membership

An additional sum of _____ is
also included to support Chapter activities.

Please make check payable to the Five Valleys Audubon Society and mail to: Five Valleys Audubon Society, PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807.

Five Valleys Audubon Society

PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

<http://www.fvamisoula.org>

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FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Secretary	Char Murray	50 Brookside Way, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5223	murray555@bresnan.net
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2009-2012	Joyce Nave	4605 Rattlesnake Dr., Missoula, 59802	721 – 2981	nave@bresnan.net
2010	Gerhard Knudsen	4400 Scott Allen Dr, Missoula, 59803	251 – 2765	gmk@bresnan.net
2010	Bill DeCou	PO Box 8674, Missoula, MT 59807	728 – 5376	billdecou@bigsky.net

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	Elizabeth Johnston	1101 W Greenough, Unit E-8, Missoula, MT 59802	327-1525	birder@bigsky.net

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www.mtaudubon.org

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Board President: Dan Sullivan

Program Director: Janet Ellis jellis@mtaudubon.org

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Administrative Officer: Larissa Berry lberry@mtaudubon.org